



AMERICAN FEDERATION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, AFL-CIO

Eric Bunn Sr.
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March 9, 2022

The Honorable Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Chairman
House Education and Labor Committee
2176 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington DC 20515

The Honorable Virginia Foxx
Ranking Member
House Education and Labor Committee
2176 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington DC 20515

Dear Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Foxx, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the American Federation of Government Employees, AFL-CIO (AFGE), which represents over 700,000 federal and District of Columbia employees including thousands of firefighters across the country, we write to express our strong support for H.R. 2499, the Federal Firefighter Fairness Act and urge the committee to vote to approve this bill through markup and onto the House floor for a vote.

This bipartisan bill introduced by Representative Salud Carbajal would bring parity for federal firefighters with their state, county, and municipal counterparts by creating an automatic presumption of disability for workers compensation for firefighters who develop heart disease or certain forms of cancer. This bill would bring fairness and dignity to firefighters protecting and serving the American people. The difficult pathway to secure workers' compensation would be eased for our nation's heroes. They would finally get the financial support they deserve for putting their lives on the line.

Federal firefighters put their lives on the line every day to protect and serve the American people. Most federal firefighters are located at military facilities. These federal firefighters have specialized training to respond to emergencies involving aircraft, ships, and munitions. Federal firefighters at the Department of Veterans Affairs serve civilians and veterans including chronically ill and bedridden patients. Federal firefighters provide emergency medical services, crash rescue services, and hazardous material containment, as well as fighting fires. Firefighters are frequently exposed to smoke, asbestos, particulate matter, and various toxic chemicals, all of which can cause cancer. These civil servants and American heroes deserve the highest quality data and best public health solutions to help prevent, detect, and treat work-related illnesses.

The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has conducted studies about the prevalence of cancer among firefighters; however, these studies have had two critical flaws: 1) the sample sizes were too small; and 2) they do not include many minority populations. This limited NIOSH's ability to draw productive statistical conclusions from their data. More comprehensive public health data must be collected to develop solutions to preventing the elevated rates of cancer in firefighters. Despite these data limitations, NIOSH researchers recently completed a study of disease incidence and mortality among 30,000 urban firefighters, which confirmed an elevated risk of dying from mesothelioma, lymphoma, and other forms of cancer.



AFGE strongly urges you to support H.R. 2499, the Federal Firefighter Fairness Act and vote to move this bill through the House Education and Labor Committee. For questions or more information please contact Fiona Kohrman at fiona.kohrman@afge.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Julie N. Tippens". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Julie" being the most prominent.

Julie N. Tippens
Legislative Director